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Libbie & Grove Urban Design Plan

Planning Studio Spring 2018

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Libbie & Grove Urban Design Plan

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Prepared for Mark A. Olinger, Director, Richmond Department of Planning and Development Review



VCU L. Douglas Wilder School of
Government and Public Affairs

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We would also like to thank community members of the Westhampton neighborhood and the Libbie and Grove commercial area. We are grateful for the time you spent meeting with us and the passion you have for your neighborhood. It is this passion that inspired many of the decisions we made over these four months.

Lastly, we would like to thank several of the other stakeholders involved in this project and in the community. We were very fortunate to have such an array of participation including meetings with Glave and Holmes Architects and others. We thank you all for your time and your feedback during this project.

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Executive Summary

This plan was created for the City of Richmond Department of Planning and Development Review to serve as a recommendation for urban design improvements and suggested changes to zoning ordinances for the Libbie and Grove commercial area located in the Westhampton neighborhood. To begin, an in-depth demographic analysis was conducted for the Westhampton neighborhood. Special attention was paid to socioeconomic factors and trends in census tracts directly surrounding the Libbie and Grove commercial corridor.

Next, an economic analysis was completed using collected demographic data. The economic analysis showed that commercial properties in the area are extremely valuable. In the last 20 years, the value of commercial properties went from \$662,250 to \$1,872,500 resulting in a 182.75% increase in assessed value (Richmond City Records).

After the demographics and economic analyses were completed we conducted a "SWO" (Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities) analysis of the area based on several hours of site assessments and meetings with various community stakeholders. We were then able to identify two case study areas, Main Street in Davidson, North Carolina and Castro Street in Mountain View, California. These locations were selected because of their unique urban design characteristics and cohesive streetscape.

Based on these analyses and new development occurring in the Libbie and Grove commercial corridor, we were able to allocate six sites or "study areas" as candidates for redevelopment.

Site 1: SunTrust Bank at the intersection of Maple Avenue and Grove Avenue

Site 2: Wells Fargo Bank on the corner of Libbie Avenue and Grove Avenue

Site 3: BP Gas Station on the corner of Libbie Avenue and Grove Avenue

Site 4: Libbie Site on Libbie Avenue, behind the main strip of the Grove Avenue commercial corridor

Site 5: 7-11 and First Citizens Bank on Libbie Avenue and York Road

Site 6: York Road Parking Deck on York Road between Libbie Avenue and Granite Avenue

All of these sites represent valuable areas within the Libbie and Grove commercial corridor. The sites were selected and designed with different intentions, but aim to create a complete streetscape for the commercial area.

Based on this analysis and study, it is our recommendation that a new zoning code be implemented for the Libbie and Grove commercial area in order to codify form based design requirements in order to preserve and enhance a village feel at Grove and Libbie and promote compatible future development.



Introduction

This plan represents a four-month study completed by the Virginia Commonwealth University Master of Urban and Regional Planning Studio Program. This study began in January of 2018 and concluded in May of 2018. Throughout this timeframe, students in the program gathered data from various sources including meetings and interviews with the Westhampton community, meetings with our client, The City of Richmond, data from the Storefront for Community Design Westhampton charette, and demographic data from the US Census. This plan also includes a demographic and economic analysis of the Westhampton neighborhood, particularly along the Libbie and Grove commercial corridor and will aim to make developmental recommendations for the city that enhance and maintain the unique characteristics, identified by community stakeholders as “village feel”, of the neighborhood.



Purpose

The Westhampton neighborhood and the Libbie and Grove commercial corridor was built out in the 1930s, off of the Richmond City electric streetcar system implemented in 1888. As a result of the streetcar, the neighborhood developed a unique and uniform design code that was quintessential to its identity. Even after the end of the streetcar system in the 1950s, many of the same design elements in the Westhampton neighborhood have remained consistent. Developers in this area are currently facing issues with new projects due to the constraints put on them by the current zoning ordinances. This results in many having to undergo the Special Use Permit (SUP) process.





Several changes within the Westhampton community prompted recent redevelopment efforts, namely the redevelopment of the Westhampton on Grove site. This site was comprised of the Westhampton Theater established in the 1950s and a landmark for the Libbie and Grove commercial area. Redevelopment efforts consisted of a plan to construct a mixed use, three-story building, which exceeded the current twenty-eight foot height limitation. The development of this particular site sparked debate in the neighborhood, resulting in many questions about the current zoning standards of the neighborhood, and how they relate to future development. As the debates between the Westhampton community, developers, and the city continued, the Planning Studio at Virginia Commonwealth University saw this as not only a learning opportunity for community engagement, but to also recommend urban design practices and changes to form based zoning codes to help guide future development for the growing area.



Intentions

This plan, first and foremost, is an academic exercise allowing students to work directly with the community, the city, and other stakeholders. The reflections and recommendations of this plan represent those of the students in Virginia Commonwealth University's Planning Studio 761. Throughout this study, several meetings and discussions occurred between community members, planners with the city, and developers involved in the current redevelopment project at Libbie and Grove. These conversations led this class to make informed recommendations regarding the site selection and overall characteristics of the neighborhood.



Client

The recommendations made in this plan are for the Richmond Department of Planning and Development Review. The Richmond Department of Planning and Development Review has the ability to review and potentially enact some of the proposed coding changes and site proposals. The neighborhood of Westhampton falls in the western portion of the City of Richmond, and therefore it is at the discretion of the city which proposals are further reviewed.



Vision Statement

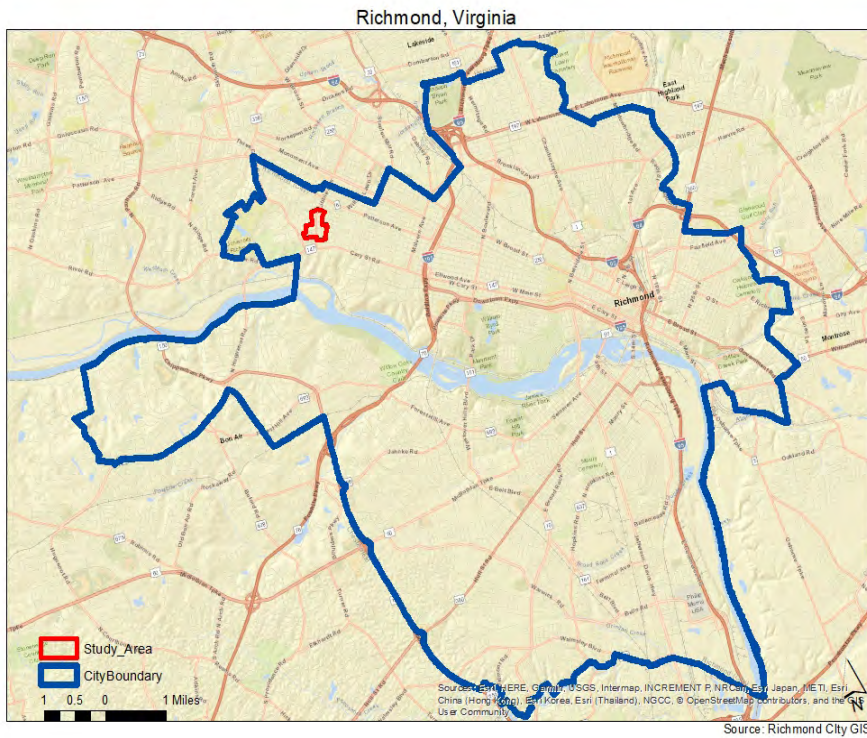
To codify a form-based design requirement that aims to preserve and enhance the village feel in the Libbie and Grove commercial corridor, while promoting compatible future development.

Demographics

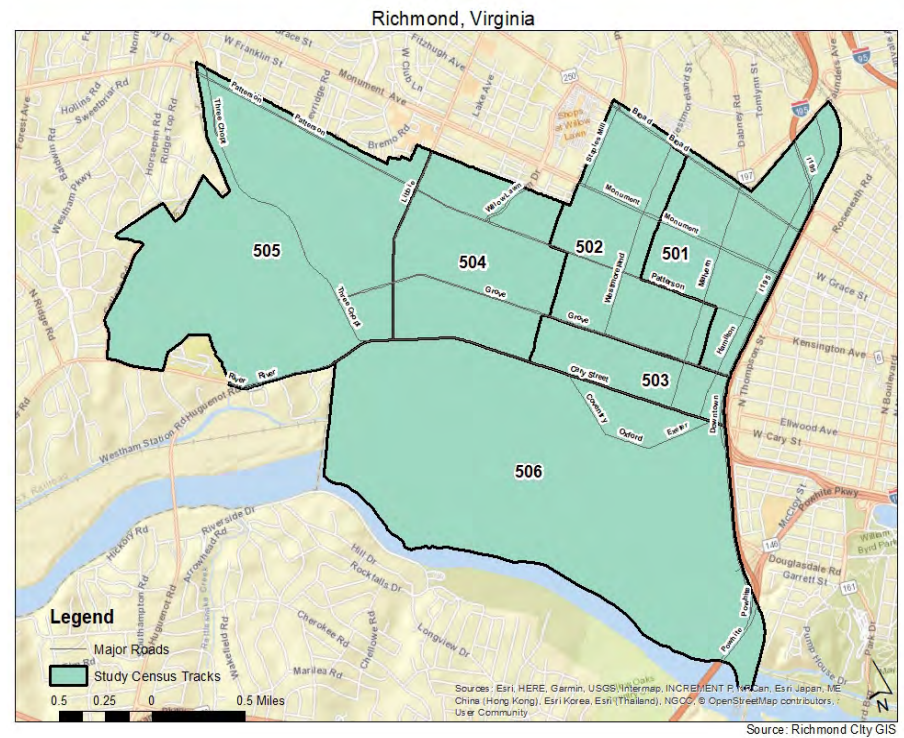
Six Richmond City census tracts were selected based on their proximity to the Libbie and Grove commercial area. The six tracts selected for analysis, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, and 506 are geographically located west of the Interstate 195, north of the James River, and south of West Broad Street (Map 1 and 2).

The population pyramids in Charts 1 and 2 show 2016 data for the age and sex distribution for both the City of Richmond and

the Libbie and Grove study area, respectively. The Libbie and Grove area has a relatively higher percentage of Millennials (ages 20 to 39) at 30.9% of the total study area population when compared to the total percent of Baby Boomers (ages 55-74) at 20.1% of the total study area population. A positive shift in the younger population could indicate that the needs of an area are changing.



Map 1: Six U.S. Census tracts surrounding the Libbie and Grove commercial area within the city of Richmond.



Map 2: Six U.S. Census tracts surrounding the Libbie and Grove commercial area.

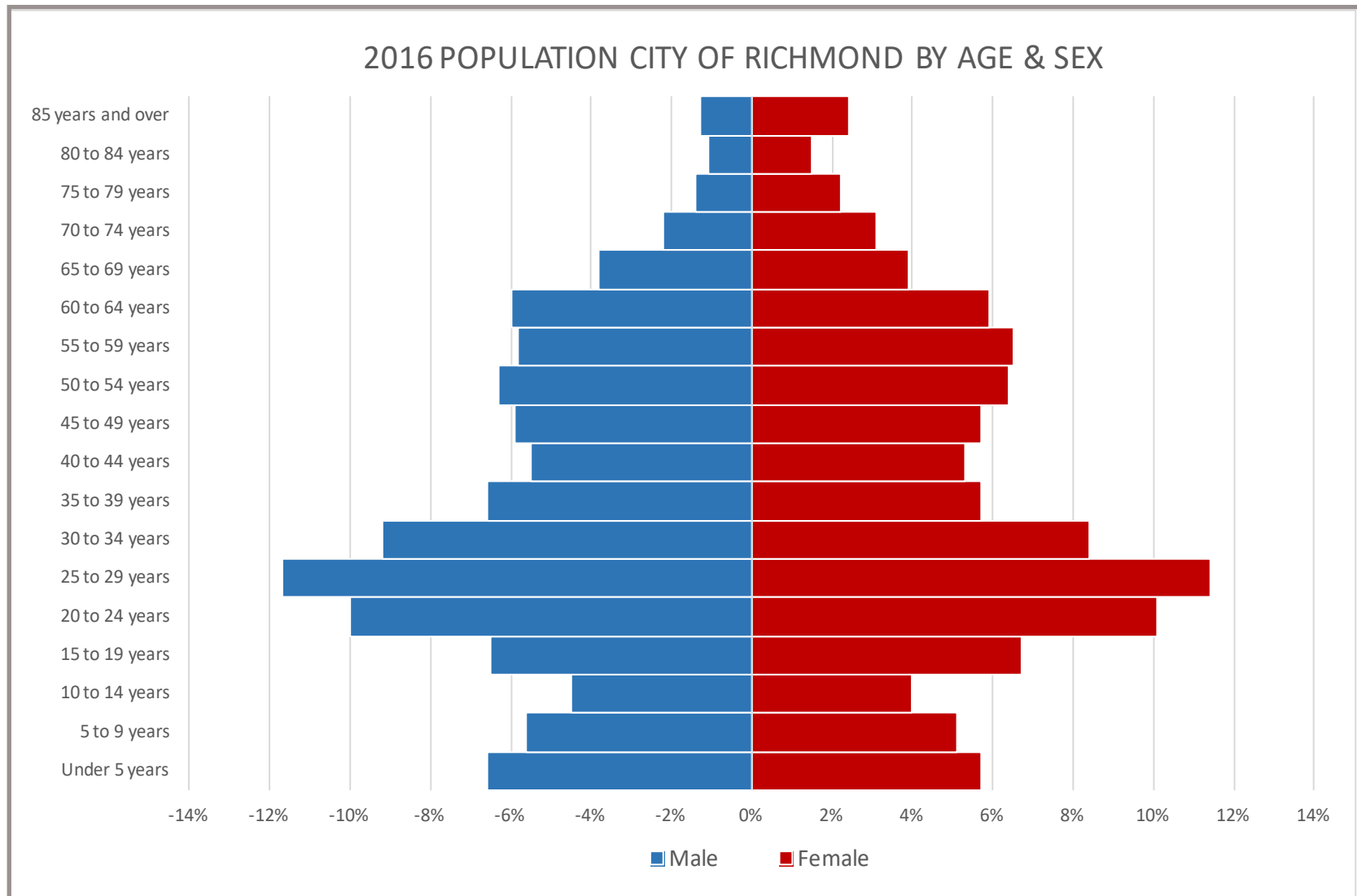


Chart 1: 2016 population by age and sex for the City of Richmond.

2016 POPULATION FOR CENSUS TRACTS 501-506 BY AGE AND SEX

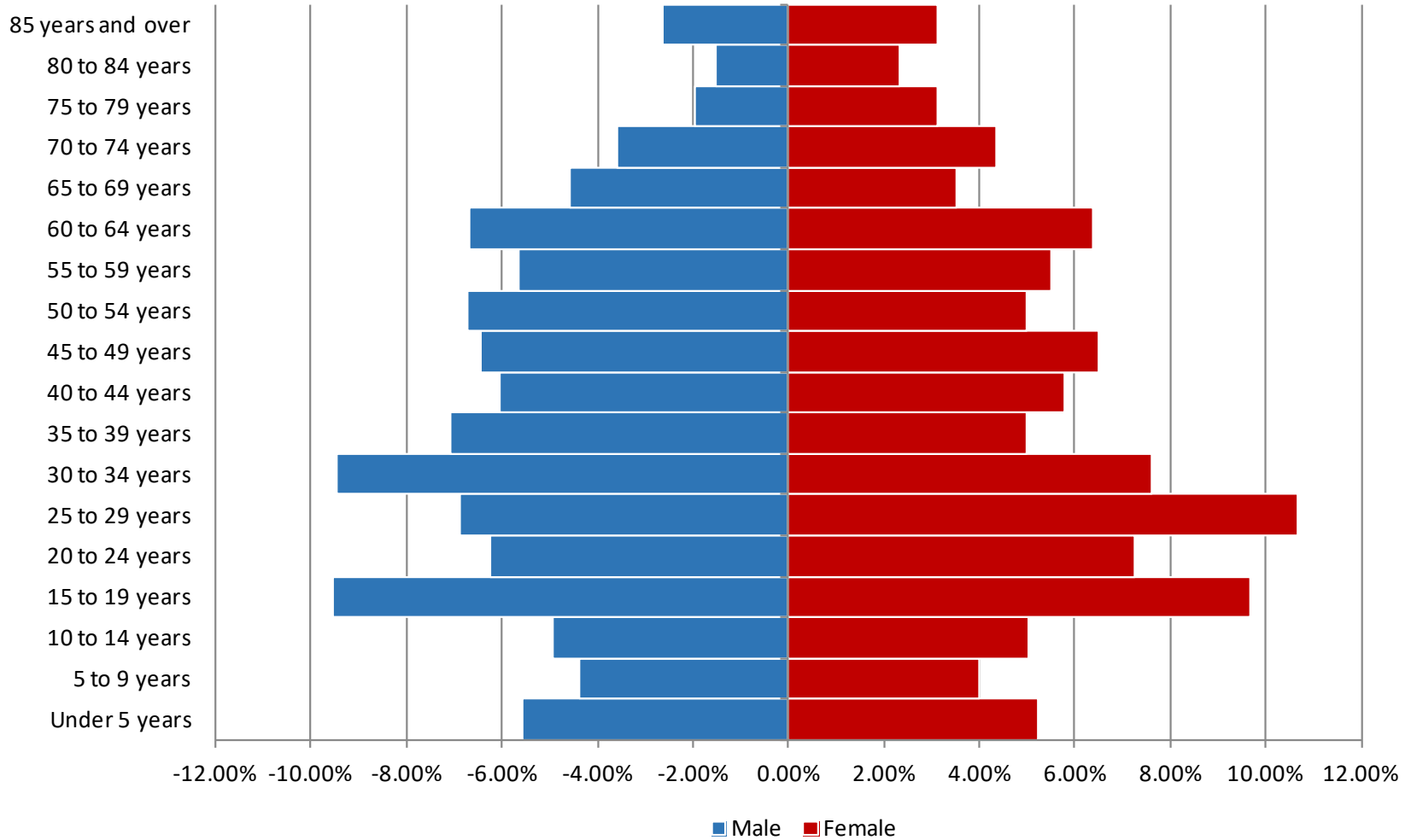


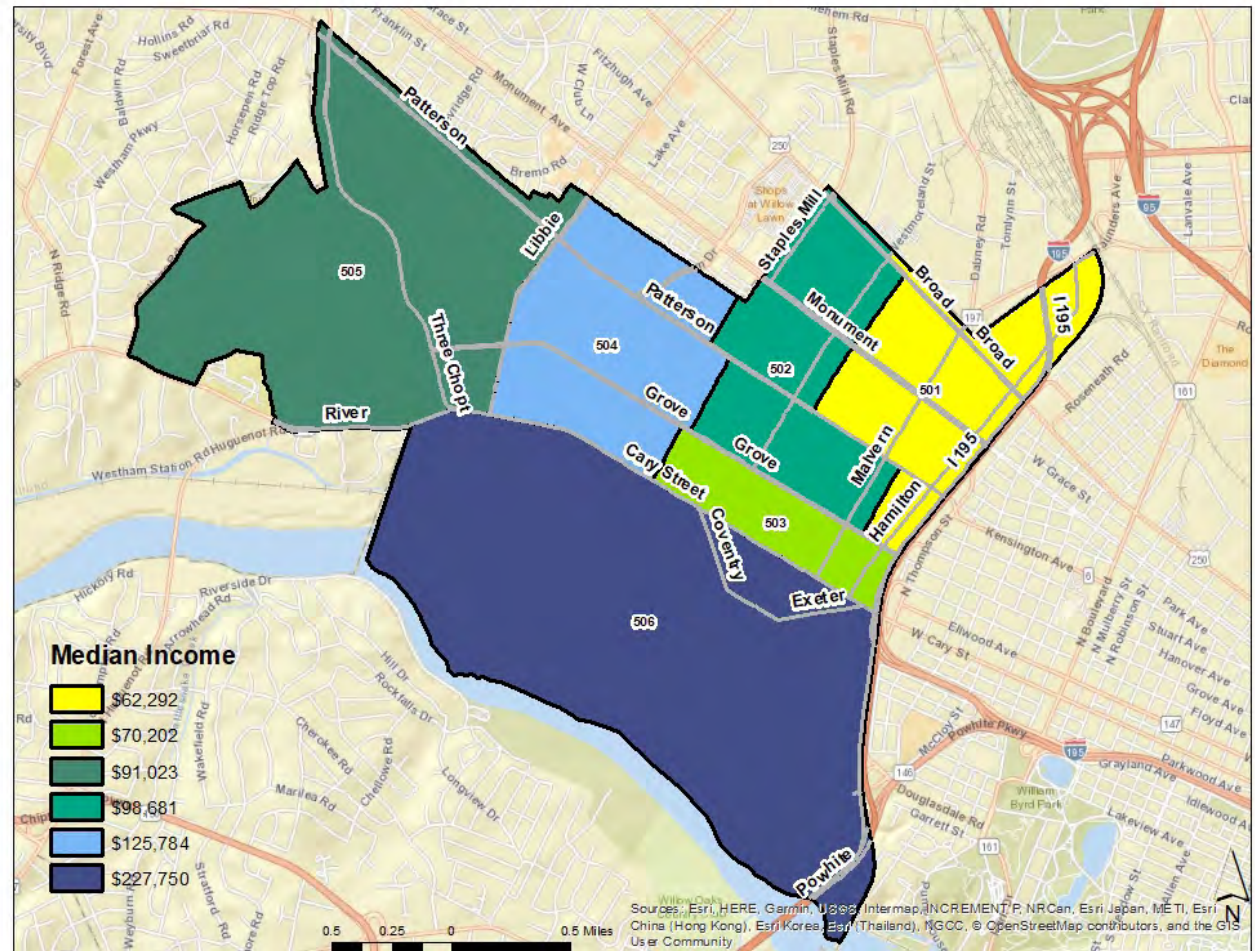
Chart 2: 2016 population by age and sex for census tracts 501-506.

Economic Analysis

The median household income from the 2000 census was lowest at \$49,213 for the tract 501 and as high as \$163,284 for tract 506. According to the 2010 census tract 501 still had the lowest median household income at \$55,000 and the tract 506 still had the highest median income at \$183,177. The 2016 American Community Survey shows that census tract 501 still has the lowest median income at \$62,292 per year. The percent change in median income for tract 501 from 2000 to 2016 was an increase of 26.58%. The percent change in median income for the 506 census tract from 2000 to 2016 was an increase of 39.48%. Median household income of Richmond City in 2000 was \$31,121. Median income according to the 2016 American Community Survey was \$41,187 in the city. This is percent change of 32.34%. Even the lowest census tract in the study area was \$18,092 dollars higher than the city median household income.

Property values surrounding the study area have a significant impact on the types of scale of development that takes place. The average single-family home sale price in the same 23226 zip code was \$450,255 in 2008. As of the end of 2017 the average home sale price had risen to \$535,965 resulting in a 19.04% increase in sale price in less than ten years. In 2000,

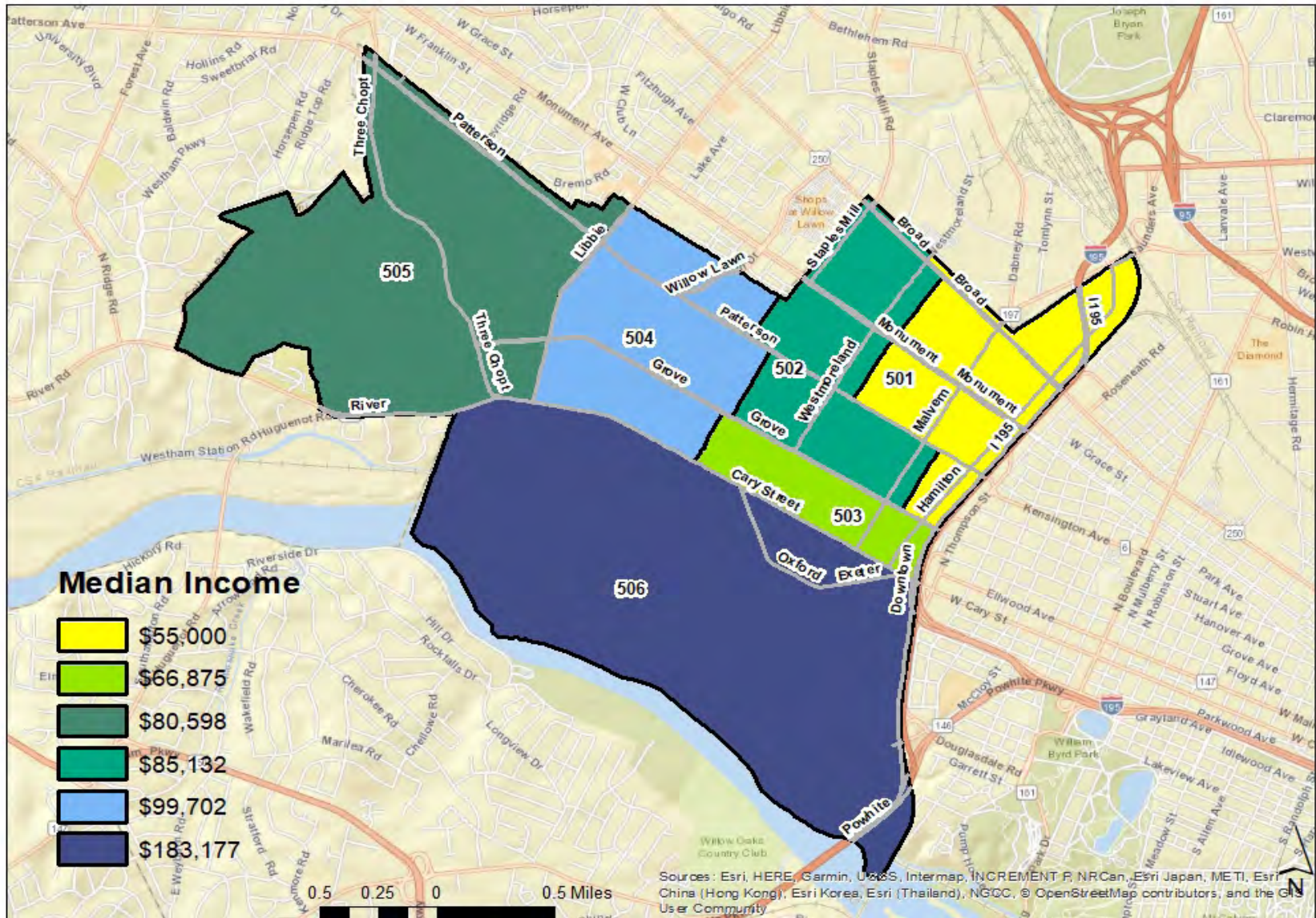
2016 Median Household Income By Census Tract



Map 3: Median household income by census tract (2016).

commercial properties located within the area, the average total assessed value was \$662,250 in 2000. In less than 20 years, this number jumped to \$1,872,500 resulting in a 182.75% increase in assessed value.

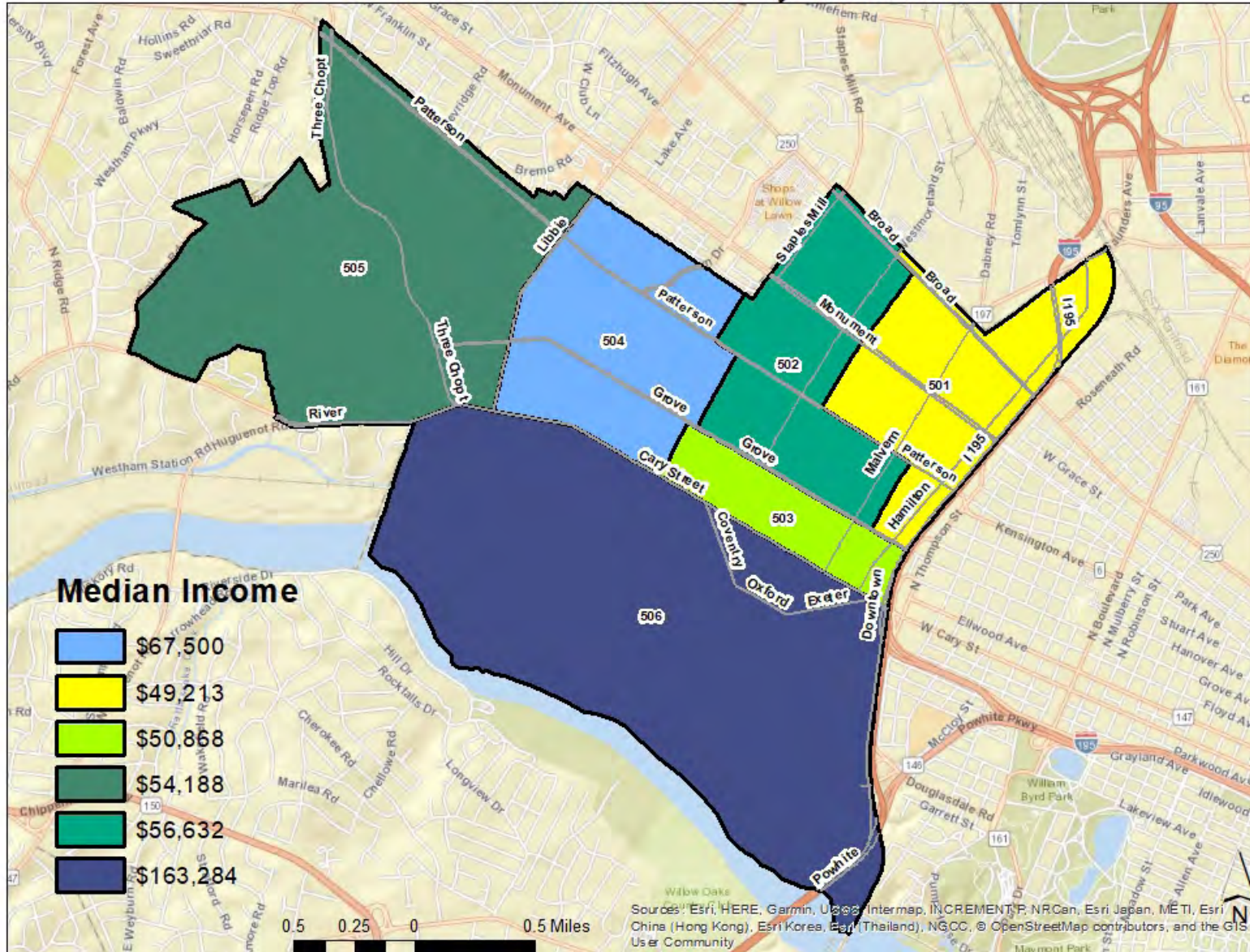
2010 Median Household Income By Census Tract



Map 4: Median household income by census tract (2010).

Source: 2010 United States Census

2000 Median Household Income By Census Tract



Source: 2000 United States Census

Map 5: Median household income by census tract (2000).

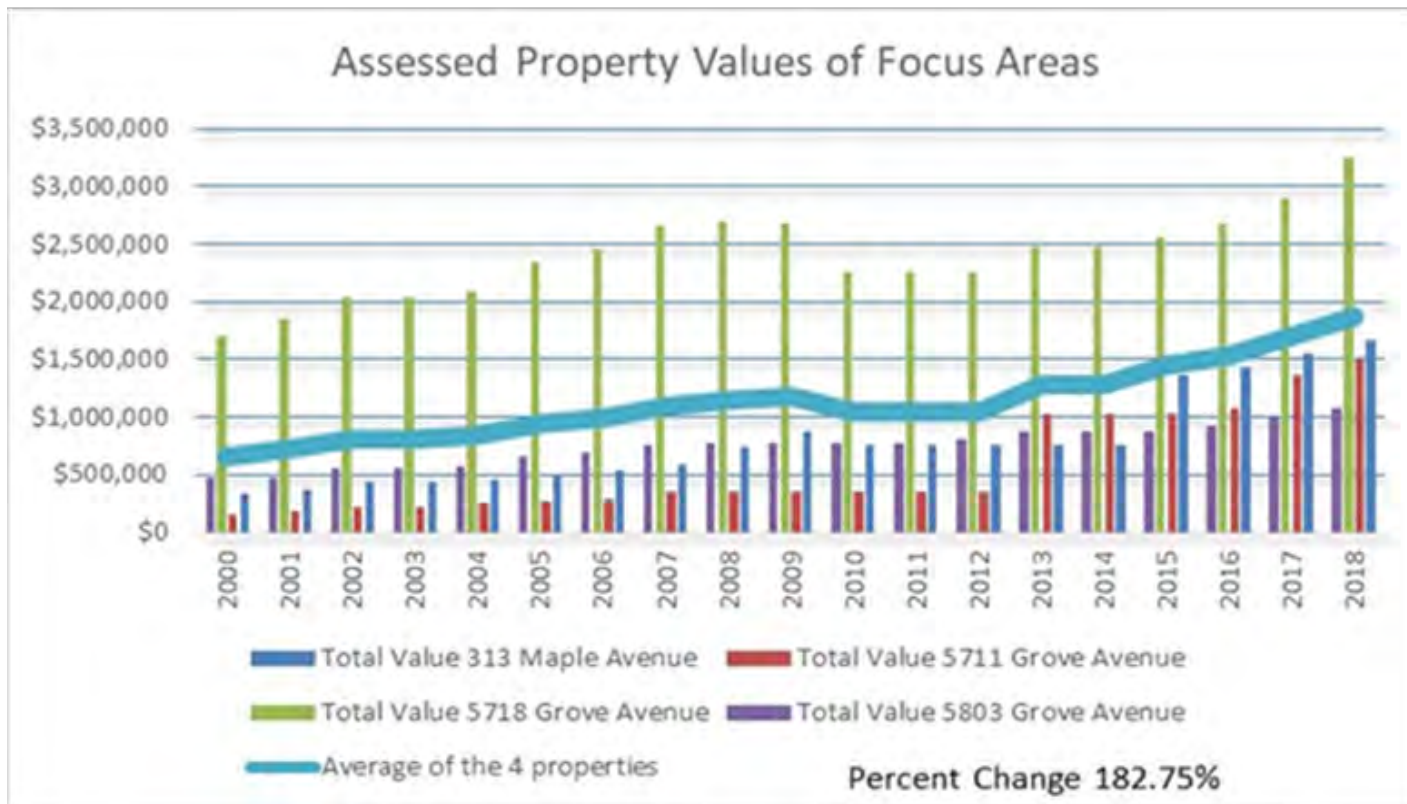


Chart 3: Assessed property values of study area

Census Tract	2000 Median Houshold Income	2016 Median Household Income	Percent Change From 2000-2016
501	\$49,213	\$62,292	26.58%
502	\$56,632	\$98,681	74.25%
503	\$50,868	\$70,202	38.01%
504	\$67,500	\$125,784	83.35%
505	\$54,188	\$91,023	67.98%
506	\$163,284	\$227,750	39.48%

Chart 4: Median household income by census tract and year.

Community Engagement

City of Richmond

In a series of four client meetings, the project team received insight from planners with the City of Richmond. In the initial stages of this plan, a rough outline of was presented to the city and changes were made to the plan. With that feedback in mind, another meeting was held to discuss changes. Several meetings included discussions of of undergrounding the existing telephone wires lining Grove Avenue (where the old streetcar line was), curb extensions to allow for more planters and green spaces, introduce a “complete streets” approach in order to disperse traffic more efficiently, and recode the existing zoning to potentially allow for higher building height.

Local Residents

Through the course of the study period, efforts were made to engage with existing members of the Westhampton Community. In these particular meetings, we were able to discern many elements of the community that helped define certain attributes of the commercial corridor. Figure 1 represents an aspirational drawing completed by members of the community the organization Save Libbie and Grove. The Save Libbie and Grove organization told RVA Mag that the ideal redevelopment in the area included maintaining the 28-foot building height restriction, maintaining undulating facades and varying rooflines. All of the characteristics tie into creating the “village feel” many residents are so drawn to in the area. There are three schools within a mile of the main commercial corridor. Many of the children who live in the neighborhood attend these schools,

Save Libbie & Grove Aspirational Rendering



Front View Grove Avenue

Figure 1: Save Libbie Grove aspirational rendering

and walk to and from school. Traffic and the general safety that come with increasing the density of an area seem to be ever present among many resident’s minds. Residents understand that low-density development is no longer financially viable, especially in an area as economically attractive as the Libbie and Grove corridor, however some are reluctant to support a higher density development due to concerns for the overall well-being of the neighborhood including more traffic, more noise, and less available parking.

Other Stakeholders

There are several other stakeholders in this specific redevelopment plan whom offered pertinent input and feedback throughout this analysis. One of the key stakeholders is an architect with firm Glave and Holmes. Glave and Holmes is the firm responsible for the current redesign on the commercial corridor on Libbie and Grove. Insight was gained through this meeting as to how the community responded to the current redevelopment occurring on Grove Avenue. The image in Figure 2 is a rendering from Glave and Holmes demonstrating the proposed structure at the corner of Grove Avenue and Granite Avenue. As referenced above, some residents in the area expressed concern about this plan because it exceeded the current twenty-eight foot height restriction in the area and compromised the “village feel”, or the ongoing feeling of a quaint town. The architect explained that the design would work with three stories with the third story stepback because the third story will essentially be hidden from view. Glave and Holmes also explained that the dimensions on the redevelopment of the movie theater are the exact same, so the historic value is carried through the entire redevelopment.

Storefront - Westhampton Charrette

As mentioned earlier, the Storefront for Community Design held a charette in the Westhampton neighborhood to gain feedback regarding the ongoing redevelopment on the Libbie and Grove commercial corridor. The charette took place in November of 2017, and engaged with the community by examining and voting on various case studies, providing feedback about the redevelopment occurring in the neighborhood, and voicing concerns about the future of the Westhampton neighborhood. This feedback provided valuable insight to this report and plan, especially as we consider our case studies and our particular site selections.



Figure 2: Westhampton redevelopment rendering from Glave and Holmes.

SWO Analysis

A Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities (SWO) Analysis is a strategic planning technique used to help a person or organization identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities related to project planning. It is intended to specify the objectives of the project and identify the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieving those objectives. This particular SWO analysis was compiled near the beginning of the study period and used to focus in on particular areas.

Strengths

The commercial corridor of Libbie and Grove boasts a variety of retail businesses along Libbie Avenue and Grove Avenue in the vicinity of the Westhampton neighborhood. The area maintains a “village” setting which local residents define by the 28-foot height restriction for buildings, undulating store frontages, and varied roofline which together creates the unique charm of Libbie and Grove.

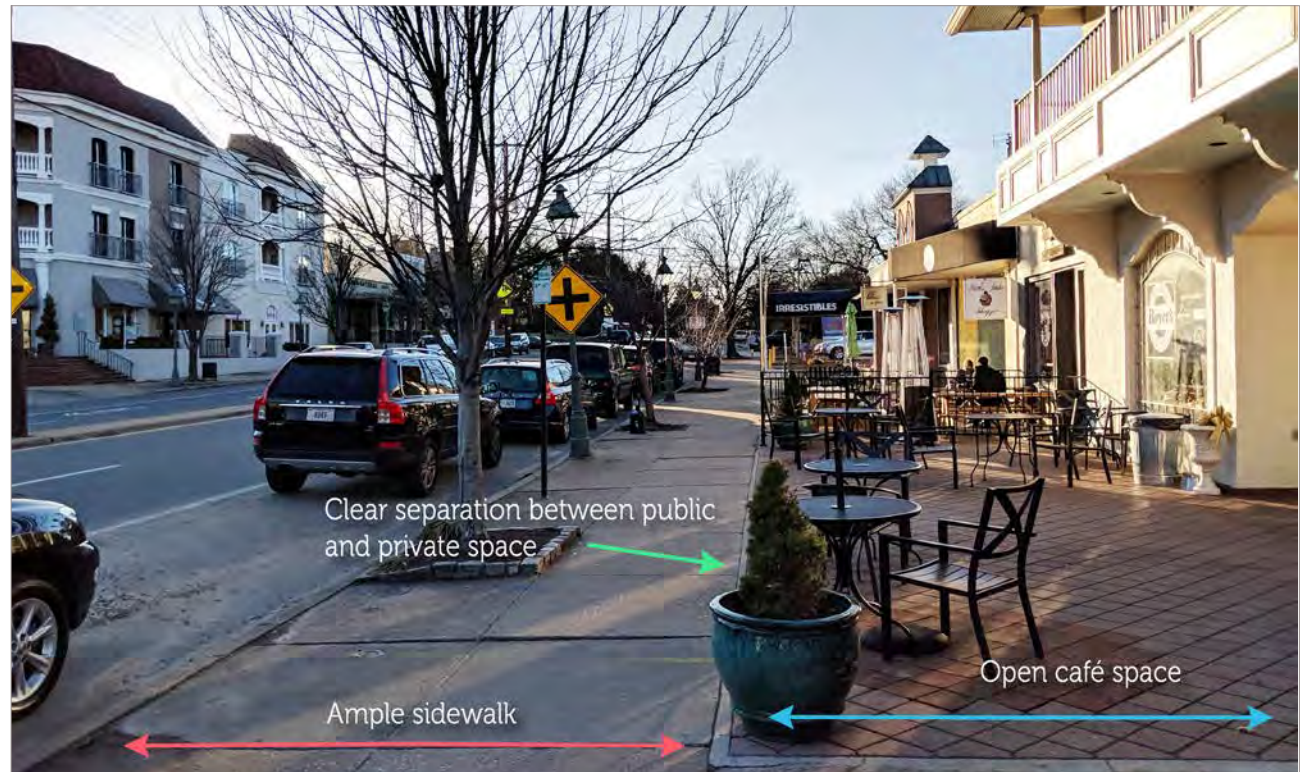


Figure 3: West on Grove Avenue, example of area strength.

Currently, property value for the commercial area is high making it a valuable spot for commercial and residential development. The existing retail strip along Grove has ample sidewalk and cafe space with a clear separation between public and private realms (See Figure 3).

Additional designated outdoor spaces, mostly private cafe spaces, like the one outside Libbie Market have covered seating areas for shoppers to eat or relax (See Figure 4). The new development on the former site of the Westhampton Theatre will also have an outdoor gathering space included as part of the project.



Figure 4: Libbie Market

Weaknesses

One of the biggest weakness of the Libbie and Grove commercial area is the amount of space dedicated to on site surface parking. The best examples of this are the SunTrust Bank, Wells Fargo Bank, the 7-11, and the B.P. gas station. Street facing parking lots like these create large setbacks from the buildings to the road and prioritize vehicular traffic over pedestrian safety (See Figure 5). Pedestrian access is also limited along Libbie Avenue due to the narrow, graded sidewalk which spans from Grove Avenue to York Road (See Figure 6).



Figure 5: BP Gas station



Figure 6: North on Libbie Avenue, example of congested sidewalk

Opportunities

Two of the greatest opportunities for development in the Libbie and Grove area are the Wells Fargo (Figure 7) and BP Gas station (Figure 8) on the south side of the Libbie and Grove intersection. Both buildings are on larger tracts of land with much of it dedicated to surface parking.

The buildings themselves are small and built too far back from the edge of the public right of way (ROW). With these two parcels fronting the main intersection of the project area they possess the biggest opportunity for creating improvements in the project area.

There are other opportunities outlined in the “Site Selections” section of the plan that address six specific sites we selected to redesign. All of these sites are located along prominent areas within the commercial corridor and have the opportunity to address certain pedestrian corridors. One of the consistent opportunities among these sites is creating a consistently wide setback in order to create walkable cafe space along the sidewalk. Most of these spaces also address the corners with chamfers, awnings, open windows, and other features that make for an exciting walk.



Figure 7: Libbie and Grove site photo, Wells Fargo front parking lot



Figure 8: Libbie and Grove site photo, BP gas station

Case Studies

Case studies are in-depth investigations of a single person, group, event or community. For the Libbie and Grove commercial corridor, two areas of similar size, density, and character as Westhampton were selected to investigate. The first case study, Davidson, North Carolina, was shared with the community at the charette held by the Storefront for Community Design. Community members cited the fact that Davidson has similar characteristics as the Libbie and Grove commercial area, with some enhancements that the community members enjoyed.



Figure 9: Davidson, NC

The second case study is from Castro Street in Mountain View, California. Castro Street is known for utilizing flexible zoning allowing restaurants to utilize street parking spaces for dining spaces during off hours. Both of these examples were analyzed as and used for precedent images in the redevelopment of Libbie and Grove.

Main Street; Davidson, North Carolina

The American Planning Association (APA) recognized the success of the Town of Davidson's Main Street program in creating a "quintessential American feel and historic charm" ("Main Street: Davidson, North Carolina", American Planning Association). Success of this was rooted back in the 1990s when this community collectively voted on keeping the low density and limiting road space from the North Carolina Department of Transportation's expansion plans. In 2013, the Town of Davidson was awarded by APA as the most "walk-Friendly" and "bike-Friendly" town in the United States. Residents of Libbie and Grove were presented with photos of Davidson, North Carolina along with several other communities to gauge how the community feels about the streetscape in the area. Several residents responded positively to the street trees and the lower density buildings. Many residents identified with the consistent scale of the commercial district in Davidson, and resonated with the general layout of the streetscape.

Castro Street; Mountain View, California

Castro Street is a useful model and case study for the Libbie and Grove commercial corridor, especially in regards to streetscape improvements, layout of street trees and biophilic improvements, and the dynamic facades of the building frontages. Castro Street developed in a similar fashion to Westhampton, developed their commercial corridor with the pedestrian in mind. The on-street parking spaces are incorporated into the area's flexible use, giving restaurants and shops the ability to utilize street parking for dining and other uses during non-peak hours. This type of pedestrian-focused use makes people feel comfortable using these spaces. Another asset on Castro Street is the liberal and intentional use of street trees. The street trees along Castro Street intentionally shape the on-street parking spaces, making the trees purposeful in their placement. The usage of street trees help to mitigate one of the major concerns in an area like Castro Street and in the Libbie and Grove commercial corridor, traffic. Street trees act as a natural traffic calming device.



Figure 10: Castro Street, Mountain View



Site Selections

We chose six existing sites within the neighborhood as ideal areas for redevelopment. The following designs are potential scenarios we devised that coincide with ongoing and future development in the commercial corridor (see Map 6).

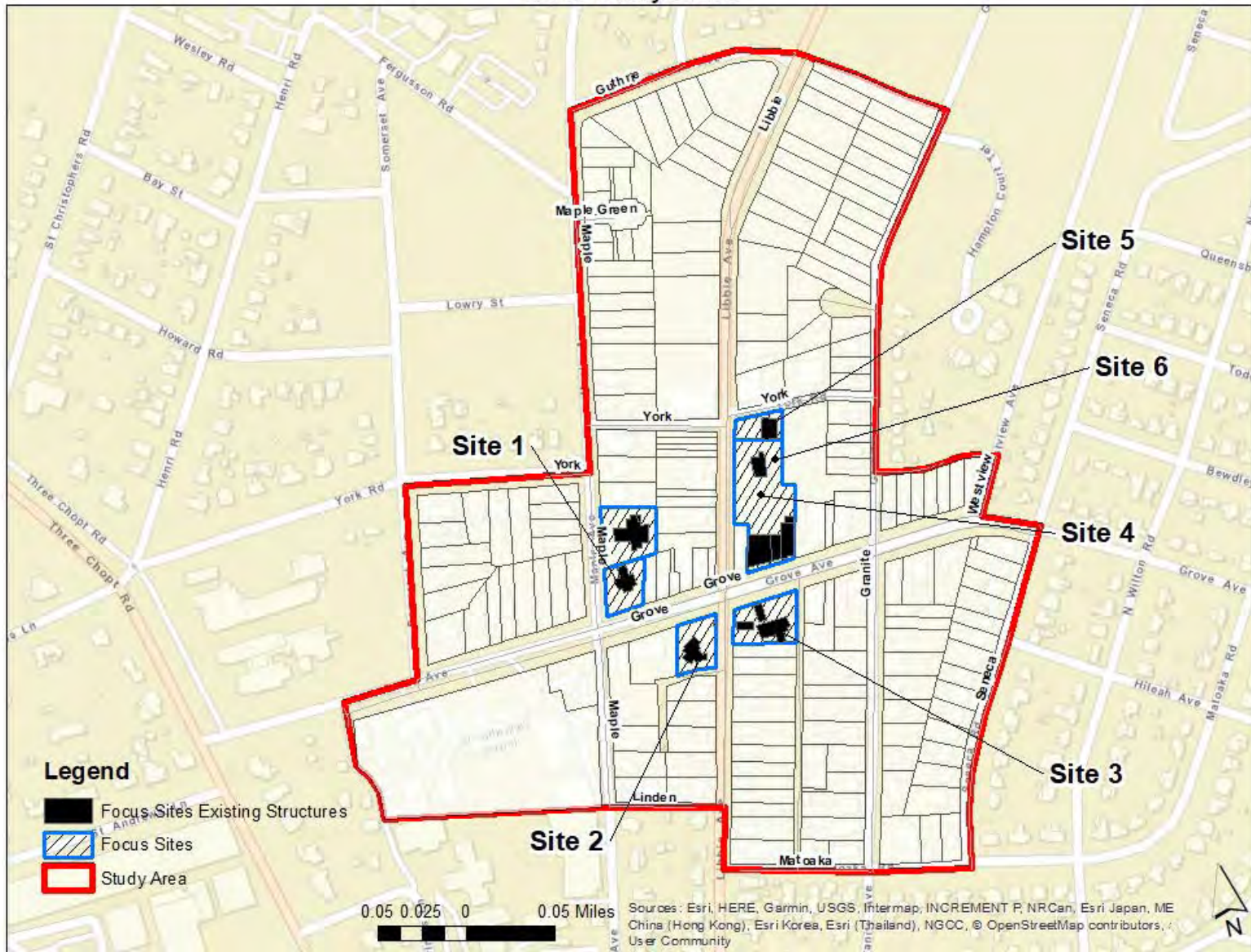
Among our selected sites most have large swaths of pavement and numerous curb cuts which break up sidewalks and make the street less safe for pedestrian travel. These sites currently house solitary, single-use buildings, or are entirely surface parking; which easily allows for infill development to further enhance the neighborhood fabric. An aspect of what residents describe as the “village feel” of Libbie and Grove is walkability, however existing developments with large, paved setbacks prioritize vehicular traffic and contradicts the pedestrian-centric, “village feel”.

Next we looked at the prominence of various sites in relation to the broader neighborhood. Specifically, we looked at gateways

and corner sites. Gateway sites provide transition between types of urban uses. Prominent corner sites provide orientation and can serve as the heart of a district. Gateway and corner sites have the potential to stand out architecturally. In addition, we chose corner sites as areas to embrace an increase in density.

All six chosen sites were notable for their discordance in relation to the “village feel”. Multiple driveways per parcel interrupt the pedestrian experience, forcing the walker to look for traffic rather than look into shop windows. Sites with broad parking setbacks disconnect and isolate businesses from the solid store frontage found elsewhere in the neighborhood. We wanted to heal the edges of the public realm by bringing buildings up to the sidewalk, thereby creating a consistent public realm. Beyond aesthetics, we felt that infill of these sites would also boost economic opportunity for commercial ventures currently at the disconnected fringes of the district.

Case Study Sites



Source: Richmond City GIS

Map 6: Parcel map of the Libbie and Grove study area with focus areas for redevelopment in blue.

Six New Site Designs

Site 1: SunTrust Bank

Existing Conditions

The Maple and Grove SunTrust Branch building was built in 1989 on the corner of Maple Avenue and Grove Avenue. In 2018 the building was assessed at \$1,345,000, up from \$882,700 in 2006. The current structure is colonial revival architecture with deep front and side setbacks. There are several curb-cuts with sidewalk interruptions on the front and side of the building. This perpetuates an uncomfortable and unsafe walk for pedestrians in the area. The building includes street facing parking with the majority of the site covered by car-oriented impervious surfaces.

Good Candidate for Redevelopment

The SunTrust Bank Site is situated as a gateway to the commercial core of the Libbie and Grove neighborhood, marking the the historic mixed-use corridors' western edge with the surrounding low-density residential streetcar suburbs. The intersection at Maple and Grove sees a high volume of traffic due to both its condition as a corner gateway, and its use as a cut-through between St. Catherine's and St. Christopher's Schools. The level of activity around both this intersection and the broader corridor under existing conditions could indicate the viability of concentrated investments in developing the site to:

- Capitalize on exposure to pedestrian foot traffic as a link between the commercial and residential districts of the



Figure 11: Image from Google Earth highlighting the SunTrust bank redevelopment area

neighborhood, as well as its proximity to a heavily-trafficked thoroughfare linking Cary St. and Broad St.

- Strengthen spatial feel by improving the sense of enclosure along Grove Ave. using smaller setback requirements and higher density allowances to accommodate impending commercial and residential growth while promoting appropriate development that preserves the neighborhood's "village feel!"



Figure 12: SunTrust bank redevelopment rendering and current conditions.

Site Design

Mixed-use, medium-density plaza complex with atrium, floor-level retail along Grove Ave., upper level office space and a range of market-rate multifamily housing units. Wooden trellis along frontages that engage the corner of Maple and Grove reflects the pergola awning of Café Caturra across Grove Ave. The angular plaza and palladian-style atrium window are linked lynchpin by a swooping, curvilinear, metal and glass awning that



breaks up the more orthogonal, and natural wooden form of the trellis, creating a highly accessible entryway to the building, which itself can serve as a gateway to the neighborhood. The site transitions into the residential form of buildings extending



Figure 13: North view SunTrust bank redevelopment rendering and current conditions.

down Maple Ave., as well as the more urban and commercial building forms on Grove Ave. Second-story step-back allows for an increase in density with less of an impact on village feel at the street-level, along with balcony/garden space that overlook the street, corner plaza and café area lining the trellis, which engages the public realm, providing activity at all times of the day.

Floor-level storefronts engage with the streetscape to be pedestrian oriented through extensive, visually interesting

fenestration and café seating that stimulates activity in the public – semi-public – private zone, as well as landscaping features, street trees, and a trellis lining the sidewalks and plaza. Upper-level stepped-back to preserve pedestrian experience from the street, while creating a space for residential/office use overlooking the public realm along Grove Ave.



Figure 14: Aerial view, east down Grove Ave., SunTrust bank redevelopment rendering and current conditions.

Large atrium window exceeds 28-foot height restriction in current zoning, but this element of building form serves an aesthetic and spatially unifying purpose, which is especially suitable for a corner property serving as a distinct landmark for the historic mixed-use corridor. Massing broken up at 25'-30' horizontal increments, and 10'-15' vertical increments so that the building wall is consistent and creates enclosure without causing blank, uninterrupted walls that can be imposing to pedestrians.



Site 2: Wells Fargo Bank

Existing Conditions

The site of the Wells Fargo Bank on the southwest corner of Libbie and Grove Avenue occupies a large plot of land, comprised mainly of surface parking. There are wide setbacks around all four corners of the building that consistently interrupt the public realm. Curb cuts interrupt the pedestrian experience by creating hazardous sidewalks at the multiple parking entrances. Total assessed in 2018 was \$1,079,000, up from \$777,000 in 2008.

Good Candidate for Redevelopment

This corner is the junction for commercial activity along Grove and the commercial activity along Libbie. While the northern corners of the intersection form a continuous pedestrian shopping experience, the conditions of the southwest corner currently favor drive in / drive out vehicle traffic. The prominence of this site, coupled with existing conditions west along Grove and along the northern edge of Grove creates an opportunity to connect the pedestrian public realm and form a consistent commercial frontage. Due to being a center of activity, a higher density here could absorb some of the market pressures found in the area.

Site Design

The proposal completes the store frontage along the southern edge of Grove and incorporates varying heights for frontages to maintain a sense of scale appropriate to the area. The site incorporates a chamfered corner to transition around the block and soften the potential severity of a taller building in



Figure 15: Image from Google Earth highlighting the Wells Fargo redevelopment area

the corridor. The upper-story stepback allows more light to the public realm and maintains a sense of scale. A rooftop garden provides another opportunity to enhance the greenscape of the street.

Consistent ground level fenestration engages pedestrians, while cafe zones or other indoor/outdoor elements tie the private realm to the public realm. Setbacks allow for multiple uses along the parcel line; otherwise, buildings fill the parcel. The chamfered corner invites foot traffic to businesses along both edges. Third story step backs create the illusion of a two story building when up close.



Figure 16: Aerial view, south down Libbie Ave, Wells Fargo bank redevelopment rendering and current conditions.

Building facades use a variety of styles and materials to create a multi-building effect rather than one big box. Bottom stories reserved for retail or office, while residential could accommodate folks who want like the neighborhood, but want to downsize or simplify. As the building transitions to a smaller scale as it drifts back toward existing single-family residential homes. Ornamental roof architecture allows for more individuality of building portions. Off street parking and hidden garage accompany building residents and public.

Public realm is now consistent on both sides of Grove. Pedestrians have fewer interruptions, which increases feelings of safety and joy. Creation of an extended tree bed promotes biophilia and beautification. Addition of bike racks accommodates those in the neighborhood who are too close to drive but not close enough to walk.



Figure 17: Wells Fargo bank redevelopment rendering and current conditions.



Figure 18: Wells Fargo bank redevelopment rendering.



Figure 19: Wells Fargo bank redevelopment rendering.

Site 3: BP Gas Station

Existing Conditions

This site is currently occupied by the BP gas station on the corner of Libbie and Grove Avenues. Though this site provides a service to the neighborhood, the layout and design of the site is the reason why Site Three was chosen for analysis. There are currently large paved surfaces and several curb cuts, similar to Site Two. The curb cuts continually interrupt the pedestrian experience and make for an uncomfortable and, at times, dangerous, walk. The current design of the site detracts from the importance of the Libbie and Grove commercial corridor as it does not keep with the general design characterized by neighboring buildings.

Good Candidate for Redevelopment

The current BP gas station site presents a new opportunity to create a solid commercial frontage on the Southern edge of the Libbie and Grove commercial area. There is also an opportunity to create a more prominent corner to address and accentuate the importance of the Libbie and Grove intersection.

Site Design

Design elements deemed important by neighborhood groups included undulating facades and varied roofline, both implemented in new design.

Speakers from the neighborhood expressed hesitation toward loss of services provided currently caused by new development. New site design addresses this by including a four pump gas station at a smaller more moderate urban scale.

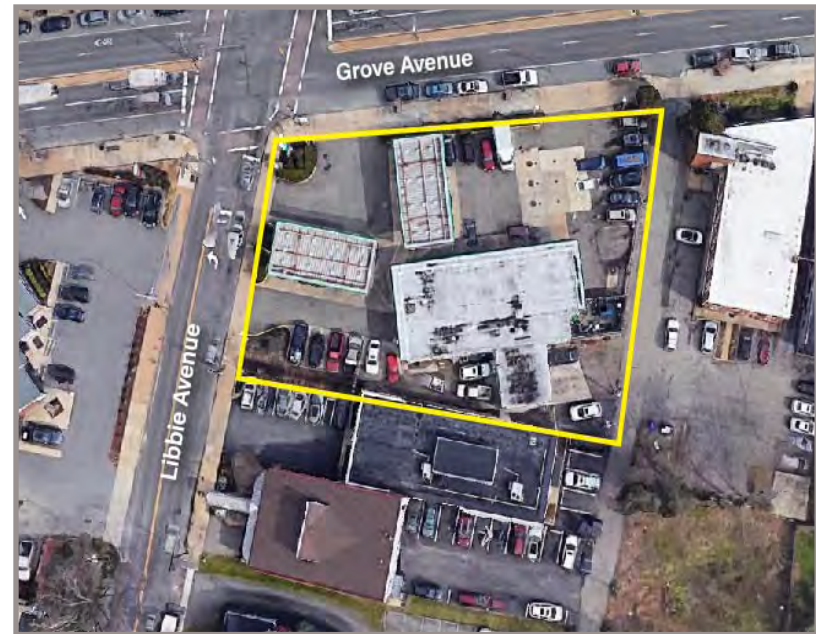


Figure 20: Image from Google Earth highlighting the BP gas station redevelopment area

Along with this, both the Libbie Ave and Grove Ave side of store frontage includes multiple styles that can be used for a number of uses, including a convenience store and a bank.

Opportunity to create a prominent corner that addresses the the importance of the Libbie and Grove intersection.

Opportunity for creating solid commercial frontage at the intersection of Libbie and Grove Avenues. Large windows at street level encourage vibrant retail spaces that engage pedestrian interest.

Sensitivity to height led to a breaking up of third story massing via use of stepbacks at various points to soften building height from pedestrian view at street level.



Figure 21: View looking east down Grove Avenue, BP redevelopment rendering and current conditions.





Figure 22: Facing East down Grove Ave, BP redevelopment rendering and current conditions.





Figure 23: BP redevelopment rendering and current conditions.



Site 4: Libbie Site

Existing Conditions

The area for this redevelopment site is located on the east side of Libbie Avenue, directly behind a row of retail structures facing south on Grove Avenue, and includes part of the First Citizens Bank parcel. Currently, this space is use as a parking lot for businesses along Grove and across Libbie to the west. The parcel is slightly graded up from Libbie Avenue which sets the parking lot at a slightly higher elevation than the road and sidewalk. The parking lot alone is approximately 18,500 square feet with about 60 spots.

Good Candidate for Redevelopment

This area along Libbie Avenue is situated at a key corner site for the entire Libbie and Grove commercial area. Set back half a block from the main gateways to the commercial core, this location is in a critical entrance point into the main commercial zone. Since any future infill of this corner site will result in removing parking spaces, an additional site located behind the existing 7-11 was also selected to house more parking.

Site Design

The overall design for this site is two, three-story, mixed-use buildings connected by an arcade in the center. The bottom floor is designated for commercial use, while the second and third floors are residential use. The first floor commercial area



Figure 24: Facing East, image from Google Earth highlighting the Libbie Avenue redevelopment area

features large street facing windows, an eight foot sidewalk, and a four foot planter. The first and second stories together are 26 feet. The third story has a step back of 10 feet with plenty of room for balconies on the street facing side.

Part of what the local residents identify as “village feel” is a 28-foot limit on building height, however limiting future development to only two stories is not sustainable for long-term growth. The 10-foot step back for the third floor allows for higher development without compromising the unique characteristic of the area. Some design details such as the arcade adds a distinct architectural flair to the building and also creates additional store frontages for the bottom floor corner commercial spaces.



Figure 25: Looking north down Libbie Ave, rendering of Libbie redevelopment and current conditions.





Figure 26: Detail views of key design elements, Libbie Ave. redevelopment rendering





Figure 27: View looking south on Libbie Ave., redevelopment rendering and existing conditions



Site 5: 7-11 and First Citizens Bank

Existing Conditions

Site 5 is the current location of 7-11 and First Citizens Bank on Libbie Avenue. York Road currently serves as an underutilized road to the north of the 7-11. Many residents in the Westhampton area characterize York Road as an alleyway or a place for students or workers to park.

The site itself currently consists of a 80-foot parking lot which serves the 7-11 and a 30-foot setback for landscaping at the bank. The majority of the space is underutilized and unactivated due to the large amount of surface parking, the curb cuts that interrupt the sidewalks, and the lack of pedestrian-oriented development.

There is an opportunity for slightly denser development on this site to coordinate with the development occurring on Grove Avenue to the south, and further north down Libbie where the new Tibur Condominiums are located.

Good Candidate for Redevelopment

This site is located along a prominent corridor of Libbie Avenue, just a half of a block away from the main Libbie and Grove commercial corridor. When examining this site, it is clear there is an opportunity for infill development to mirror the commercial strip across the street on Libbie, and to make an easier transition from the Libbie and Grove commercial corridor, which has a slightly denser development to the Tibur Condominiums to the north which are sitting taller than any development in the area at four stories.



Figure 28: Image from Google Earth highlighting the 7-11 and First Citizens Bank redevelopment site.

The shops across the street from 7-11 are less dense than the development on Grove Avenue, however they are extremely active with the presence of Libbie Market, a yoga studio, and several other popular shops in the neighborhood. The contrast in activity from the west side of Libbie to the east side--where the 7-11 currently sits--is noticeable and deters people from using that side of the street.

The proposed redevelopment will attempt to mitigate the transition from the development on Libbie and Grove to the Tibur Condominiums by softening the progression in both density and building heights. It also addresses the development and activity across the street by placing symbiotic development adjacent.



Figure 29: Looking south on Libbie Ave. 7-11 and First Citizens Bank redevelopment rendering and current conditions.

Site Design

The main proposal for this site begins with creating a more uniform setback of fifteen feet to activate the sidewalks and create a more enjoyable pedestrian experience. This would allow for cafe space along the frontages, and other indoor/outdoor elements to engage the public realm. Varying frontages and undulating storefronts remain consistent with the commercial corridor of Libbie and Grove and enhance the village characteristics that appear throughout the neighborhood.

The site design also incorporates 2-3 story structures ranging in height from 25 feet to 35 feet. The structures also include varying step backs to mirror the undulating facades and rooflines outlined in the existing structures in the Libbie and Grove commercial corridor. This characteristic contributes and maintains the “village feel” set precedent by the current building standards in the neighborhood.



Figure 30: Intersection of Libbie Ave. and York Rd. 7-11 and First Citizens Bank redevelopment rendering and current conditions.





Figure 31: Looking south on Libbie Ave. 7-11 and First Citizens Bank redevelopment site and current conditions.



Site 6: Parking Garage on York Road

Existing Conditions

Currently, this site is a parking lot that serves the commercial buildings lining Grove Avenue. The parking lot is approximately 230 feet long and extends to York Road, a lesser used cross street. The lot acts in conjunction with the current site directly to the west, which is the proposed redevelopment of site 4. This lot itself (not including the neighboring parking lots) has roughly 90 parking spaces.

Good Candidate for Redevelopment

Part of the overall design plan for the commercial area incorporates parking solutions to accommodate additional development. The parking area off of York Road is currently underutilized, however once new development begins along Libbie Ave. the current surface lot capacity will be insufficient. York Road itself is also underutilized as a cross street and instead used more like a service alley for work vehicles. Residents in the community do not view York Road as safe or preferred route to travel from Libbie Ave. to Granite Ave.



Figure 32: York Road parking garage redevelopment rendering and current conditions

Site Design

Redevelopment for this site focuses on ways to activate York Road as a thru-street and increase parking space to accommodate new development. The parking garage encompasses the entire existing parking lot, approximately 12,700 square feet, and includes two additional stories. Attached

to the deck is a 3-story, single-loaded commercial structure which faces York Road. The storefront on the bottom level of the structure helps to include York Road as an extension of the commercial corridor and encourage thru traffic on the street. In accord with the proposed zoning changes in this plan for the Libbie and Grove area, the York Road parking garage includes two bike racks which can hold up to 10 bicycles.



Figure 33: York Road parking garage redevelopment rendering

Current Zoning

The study area around the intersection of Libbie and Grove Avenues is currently zoned UB (Urban Business District). This is the first of two urban business districts. Some of the current development requirements include no required front yard but in no case can a front yard be greater than 15 feet in depth on any lot. There are no side yard requirements unless the side property line abuts a Residential district in which case there shall be a side yard of not less than 10 feet. There is also no rear yard requirement unless the rear lot line abuts a property or is located across an alley from property located in a Residential district in which case a rear yard of not less than 20 feet is required. The height limit for buildings in the UB district is 28 feet.

A few other key notes of the current UB requirements include that there is no fenestration requirement in the UB district. The current zoning does not allow for parking areas to be located between the main building on a lot and the street line. It also does not allow for driveways to intersect the principal street frontage. Uses within the study area that are not allowed by current zoning include drive-up facilities and facilities for the dispensing of motor fuels.

One indicator of the need for zoning study in the area is the high number of Special Use Permits (SUP) that exist within our study area. At the time of this study there were at least 53 unique SUPs in the study area (see Figure 34). Meaning that development taking place could not meet the requirements of the current zoning and special approval was required from city council. This is an indicator that current regulations might need to be changed to support the development market demand.

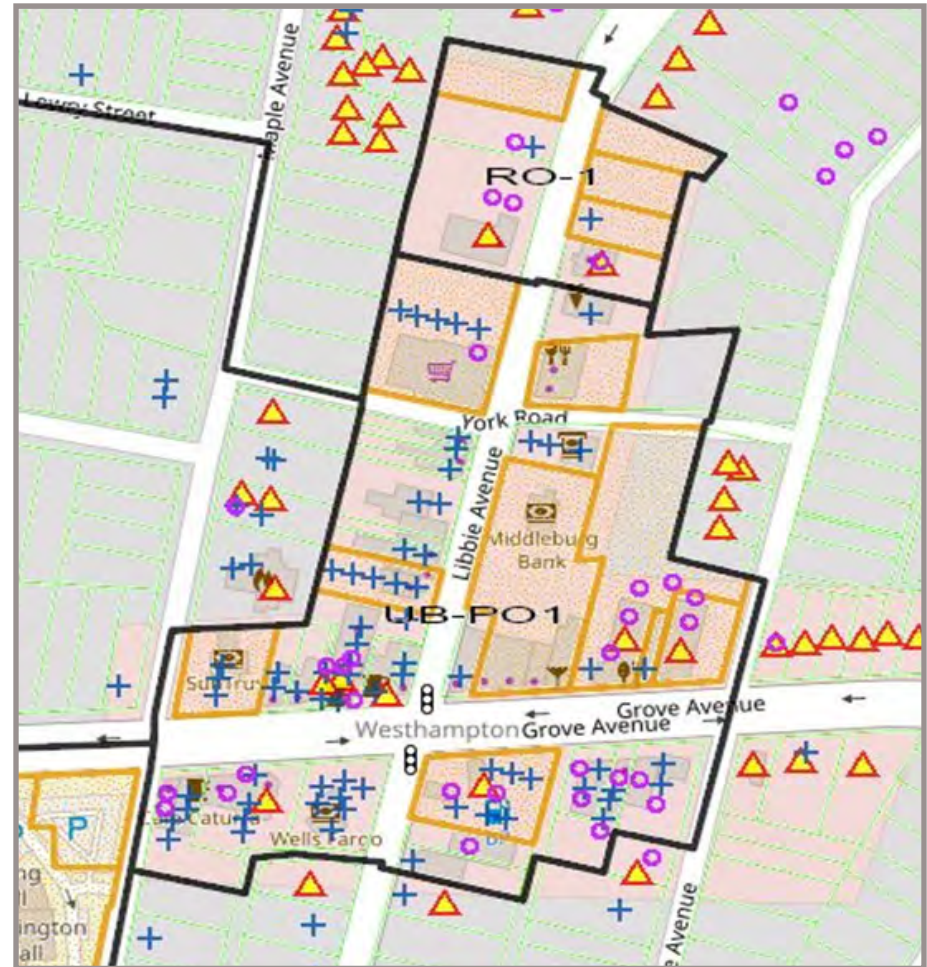
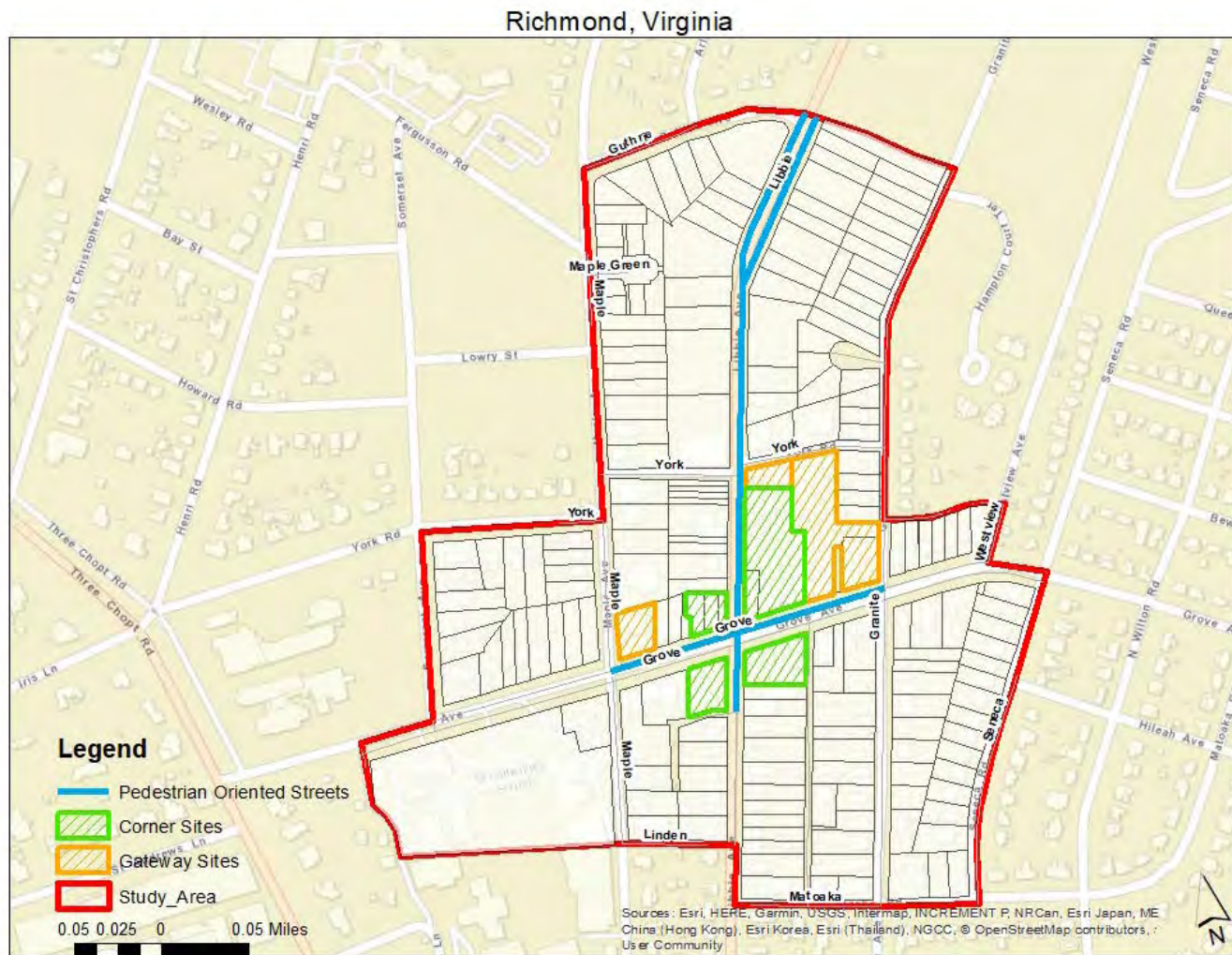


Figure 34: Current zoning for Libbie/Grove Area. Properties marked with yellow triangles represent Special Use Permits.

The four recommended biggest changes that need to be made to the current zoning include changes in height to allow for taller buildings by right. There are no current fenestration requirements and some form of regulation should be put in place to keep the store fronts active, vibrant, and oriented towards the pedestrian. There is no requirement for massing variation and the frontage of large buildings needs to be broken

up architecturally to create variation and a sense of place within the area. Lastly would be the elimination of the possibility for a 15 foot front yard. Under current requirements there could be a 15 foot front yard of dead open space. There should be a requirement that larger front setbacks provide areas for outdoor dining, public art space, or a pedestrian plaza.



Map 7: Corner and Gateway sites

Implementation

The following section describes some suggested zoning changes which, if implemented, would help the Libbie and Grove commercial area and the Westhampton neighborhood grow economically while maintaining the unique “village feel” that defines the area.

Height

No building or structure shall exceed three stories in height on lots having street frontage designated as a pedestrian-oriented street, provided that additional height, not to exceed a total height of four stories shall be permitted when all yards exceed the minimum required by not less than one foot for each one foot of building height in excess of three stories. Determination of number of stories. For purposes of this section, the number of stories in a building shall be determined by application of the definition of “story” set forth in article XII of this chapter and shall be measured at the building façade along the street frontage of the lot or, in the case of a corner lot, shall be measured at the building façade along the principal street frontage.

Height Exceptions

The height limitations set forth in this chapter shall not apply to architectural embellishments not exceeding 15 feet in height on corner or gateway sites designated as such on the Corner and Gateway Sites map (see Map 7).



Figure 35: Building heights

Minimum Height

Every main building hereinafter constructed shall have a minimum height of not less than two stories, except that porches, porticos, and similar structures attached to a main building may be of lesser height.

Tree and shrub standards

Standards for trees and shrubs shall be as follows:

1. Trees to be planted along lots having a street frontage

designated as Pedestrian-oriented Streets shall be planted at a rate of one tree for every 30 linear feet or major fraction thereof, and located within five feet of the curb.

2. Trees shall be planted in landscaped tree basins. Basin size shall be determined by the width of the sidewalk.

Minimum Tree Basin Size

Sidewalk Width	Standard Basin Size
7.5 to 12 feet	3 by 4 feet
12 to 13 feet	4 by 4 feet
13 feet and wider	5 by 5 feet

3. Landscaped tree basins shall be provided with vegetative ground cover, other plant material, shrubs, or any combination thereof. All portions of required landscaped areas not provided with vegetative ground cover or other plant material shall be mulched.

4. Shrubs located adjacent to street trees shall be minimum height of 18 inches at time of installation

5. Trees credited towards tree and shrub standards shall be of the species London Plane (*Platanus x acerifolia*) and at time of installation having a caliper of not less than two and a half inches at four feet above grade, with the lower limbs removed up to eight feet above grade.

6. All trees planted on city property become property of the city and are subject to all applicable city ordinances.

7. All trees planted on city property must be approved by the Urban Forester in writing. No tree on city property may be removed without written approval by the Urban Forester.



Figure 36: Tree plantings along Grove Ave.

Yard regulations on lots having frontage designated at pedestrian-oriented streets

1. Front yard. No front yard shall be required. In no case shall a front yard with a depth of greater than ten feet be permitted except as may be authorized pursuant to paragraph "2" of this subsection.

2. A front yard with a depth of greater than permitted by the application of the provisions of paragraph "1" of this subsection may be provided when such front yard is improved for purposes of activity generating use as defined by section "a" of this chapter

- a. Activity generating use means unenclosed exterior space either open to the sky or covered for the creation of a(n) pedestrian plaza, outdoor dining, or public art space.
- b. Bonus features, for which height and density bonuses are permitted for the creation of such spaces when the city urban design committee shall review the application and plans and submit a recommendation to the Director of planning and development review prior to approval of such plan by the Director.

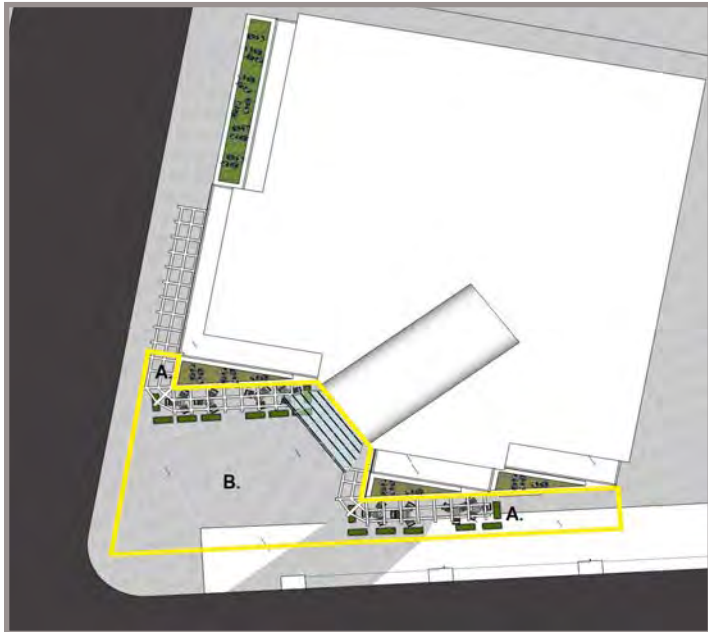
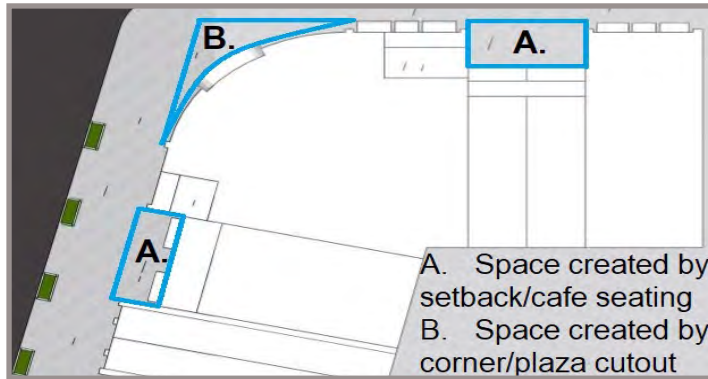


Figure 37: Example of building setbacks.

Bicycle parking requirement

For buildings on lots having frontage designated as pedestrian-oriented streets.

Multifamily dwellings	1 space for every 5 dwelling units or major fraction thereof
Commercial buildings	1 space, plus one per 500 sq. ft. of floor area in excess of 500 sq. ft.
Parking decks and garages	1 space per 10 parking spaces

1. Short-term bicycle parking spaces shall be located with 400 feet of the principal entrance to the building occupied by the use they serve. In cases where short-term bicycle parking spaces are not visible from the principal street frontage, signage to direct the public to the short-term bicycle parking spaces shall be installed and maintained.

Fenestration

Fenestration requirements applicable to building facades along street frontages designated at pedestrian-oriented commercial shall be as set forth in this section. In the case of a corner lot, the requirements shall be applicable along the principal street frontage of the lot, other than those identified as corner or gateway sites in the pedestrian-oriented streets village design guidelines.

1. Street level story. For non-dwelling uses, other than those listed in subsections 30-433.11 (1), (5), (11) and (29), a minimum



Figure 38: Example of fenestration

of 60 percent of the building facade between two and eight feet in height along the street frontage shall be comprised of windows or glass doors or both that allow views into and out of the interior building space. Windows used to satisfy this requirement shall have a minimum height of four feet. In the case of a street level story having less than its full height above the mean grade level at the building façade along the street frontage of the lot, a minimum of 30 percent of the building façade above such mean grade level shall be comprised of windows or glass doors or both that allow views into and out of the interior building space, provided that in the case of any portion of a story having less than five feet of its height above the grade level at the building façade along the street frontage of the lot, the requirements of this subsection (1) shall not apply.

2. Upper stories

a. Non-dwelling uses. For non-dwelling uses, other than those listed in subsections 30- 433.11 (1), (5), (11) and (29), windows or glass doors or both that allow views out of the interior building space shall comprise a minimum of 30 percent of the building facade between two and eight feet in height above the floor level of each story above the street level story.

b. Dwelling uses. For dwelling uses, windows or glass doors or both that allow views out of the interior building space shall comprise a minimum of 30 percent of the building facade between two and eight feet in height above the floor level of each story above the street level story. Such windows shall be double-hung, single-hung, awning or casement type, and fixed windows shall be permitted only as a component of a system including operable windows within a single wall opening.

Massing Variation

Massing Variation requirements applicable to building facades along street frontages designated at pedestrian-oriented streets shall be as set forth in this section. In the case of a corner lot, the requirements shall be applicable along the principal street

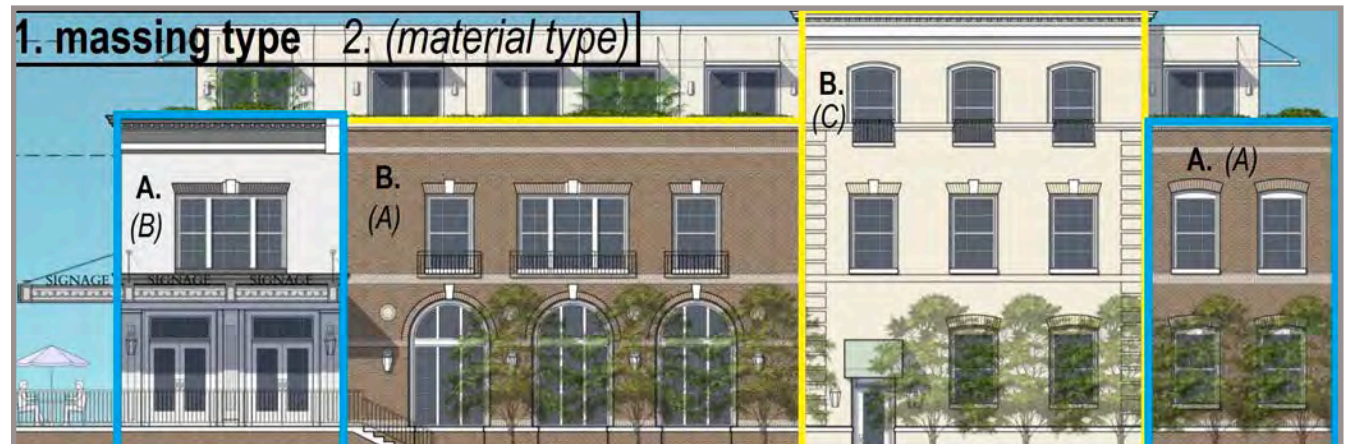


Figure 39: Example of massing

frontage of the lot, other than those identified as corner or gateway sites on the Corner and Gateway Sites map (see Map 7).

1. A minimum of 30% of any building frontage for buildings at least 50 feet in width shall be setback from the front property line a minimum distance of not less than three feet and not more than ten feet, unless otherwise specified in this chapter. Massing elements shall be added to the main portion of a building at both ends of the frontage.
2. For any building frontage exceeding 25 feet in width massing elements shall be added to the main portion of a building at both ends of the frontage and every 20 feet or major fraction thereof for building frontages over 25 feet, elements such as pilaster strips, shadow lines, building materials, colors, detailing of the windows or doors.
3. Architectural features, such as towers, cupolas and lanterns shall be used to address highly visible corners or terminated vistas. Buildings shall be architecturally differentiated through the use of color and high quality materials such as brick, textured concrete, stone, wood, and glass. Fenestration, patterns and colors shall be used to ensure the articulation of the street wall. Buildings shall provide architectural scaling and material elements to reduce the appearance of the height and length of building facades through the use of changes in wall plane, height, and materials. Buildings shall provide architectural projections, such as terraces, awnings, canopies and bay windows in order to provide variation to the building massing.

Parking decks and parking garages

1. No portion of structure located along a street frontage designated as a pedestrian-oriented street shall be used for parking or related circulation of vehicles, but such portion shall be devoted to other permitted principal uses which shall have a depth of not less than 20 feet along pedestrian-oriented streets or to means of pedestrian or vehicle access, provided that vehicle access along such street frontage shall be permitted only when no other street or alley is available for adequate access. In the case of a portion of a story located along a pedestrian-oriented street frontage and having less than five feet of its height above the grade level at the building façade along the street frontage, the provisions of this paragraph prohibiting parking or related circulation of vehicles shall not apply, provided that parking spaces shall be completely screen form view from the street by structural material similar to the material of the building façade.

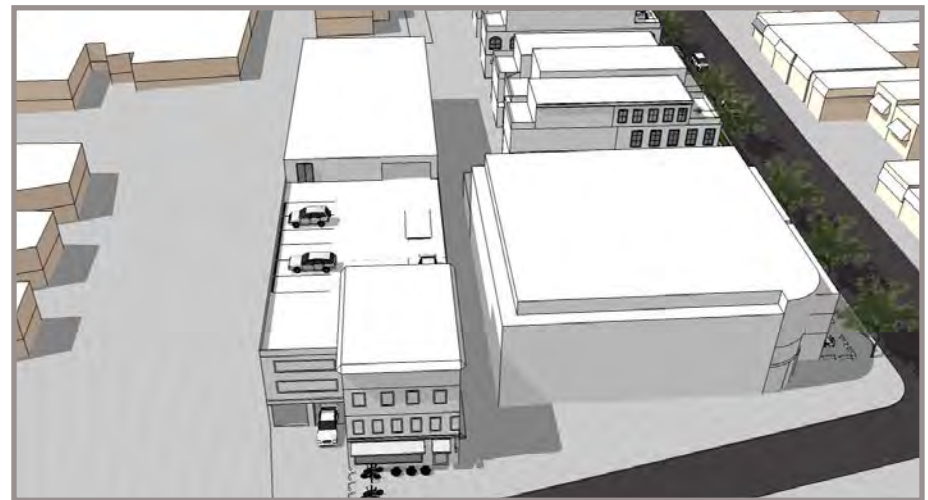


Figure 40: Example of parking garage

Other recommendations

Work with local rideshare services to generate special coupons, discounts, or loyalty rewards for trips taken within the study area. In order to further reduce the amount of vehicle travel into the study area. Enforcement of hourly parking or metered parking to discourage driving. If meters are installed create new smartphone applications that allow for the meters to be paid via phone either through a meter app or a service like Apple® pay. Longer signaling at the major traffic intersections specifically aimed towards allowing pedestrians more time to cross the street. Create crosswalks and other pedestrian specific signal devices.

Community engagement

Pro active community engagement. This should be a proactive process instead of reactive by the city to citizen concerns or reactive from citizens responding to city ideas for development. Bring together community support for the study area. Special groups such as Bike Walk RVA, The Westhampton Citizens Association, or the Westhampton Merchants Association. To gather a community voice with local elected leaders and government officials. Regularly scheduled meetings even after zoning or other government action has taken place. Continuing to receive community feedback as new development occurs. This allows to the community to be involved throughout what is a never-ending process.



Figure 41: Some of the “village feel” characteristics beloved by residents are varying roof lines and ample cafe/sidewalk space.



Conclusion

Process

As stated throughout this plan, this Studio Class created a process to make informed recommendations regarding the Westhampton Community (and Libbie and Grove commercial area, in particular) and our client, the city. In the beginning stages of this plan process, we met with stakeholders in the community and did extensive research about the demographics and economy of Westhampton to better understand the needs and wants of the area. As a solid framework for our plan began to form, we were able to allocate six sites throughout the neighborhood as candidates for evaluation and potential redevelopment. All of these sites either had a high infill opportunity or stood at a prominent intersection within the Libbie and Grove corridor. This process of site allocation and evaluation took approximately two months.

Throughout this process, we met frequently with our client, the city, and other stakeholders for feedback on our site proposals. As renderings and plans for the sites took form, we were able to create uniformity throughout the neighborhood that coincided with existing redevelopment plans. The final stages of our plan included compiling all of our data and findings in order to make informed coding and zoning change recommendations for the area. These changes examined the current zoning in the neighborhood and highlighted any major areas that would deter future economic growth or compromise the “village feel” highly sought after by residents.

Lessons learned

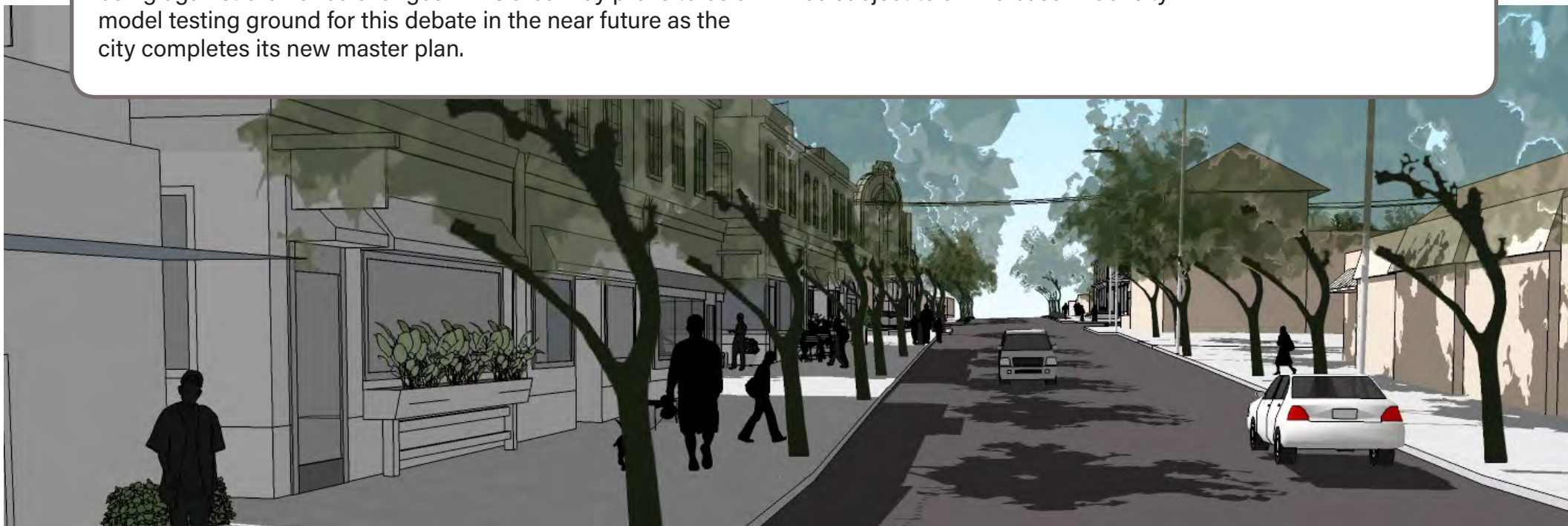
Many key corner and gateway sites are under-utilized. These under-utilized sites detract from the sense of place any commercial node aims to create in order to drive its own micro economy. Under the current zoning requirements common types of redevelopment projects are no longer financially feasible. There have been a sizeable amount of Special Use Permits applied for and granted by city council indicating the changing demands on land use in the study area. Having a wealth in an area is important to keep the neighborhood vibrant but it is not everything. This is an established commercial area that like any other thriving area of a city will need to undergo revitalization periodically in order to remain an integral part of the west end community. For everyone to be contented about the changes there must be above all transparency and community participation in all planning processes. Regarding citizen participation, at what point does local knowledge become expert knowledge? When do the city planners need to insert their expert knowledge in the area despite the residents being against ordinance changes? This area may prove to be a model testing ground for this debate in the near future as the city completes its new master plan.

Next steps

What steps need to be taken in order to maintain that “village feel”? Be flexible enough for the area to be able to mature and grow organically. However, maintain that level of vigilance to preserve the existing strengths of the area. Work closely with local officials. Develop working relationships with city staff, members of the city planning commission, and city council representatives from the district. Create changes to the existing zoning ordinance that allow for tougher controls on design to preserve the unique character of the area, but leave some room for improvements

Significance

Focus on a blend of local and expert knowledge. Other areas within the City do not have this level of citizens actively engaged in the planning process. Be a model for other areas beyond Richmond City. Show what type of community can exist with active citizen participation. As the city grows all areas will be subject to an increase in density.



Appendix

Meeting Minutes

When: March 10, 2018

Where: Hibbs Hall on the Virginia Commonwealth University Campus (VCU)

RE: Libbie Grove Draft Plan Review

In attendance: Jim Smither (VCU instructor), and Professional Architect

From his professional expertise looking at the selected sites, there was not a lot of motivation in maintaining 2 story building height. This is due largely for land price being so high. The capitalization rate on the Westhampton Theater Site was 7, but at the end of the day it was 7.5. So there is a very marginal gain that would generally result from any development.

He identified 3 levers: "Negotiate Cost of Land", "Cost of Project", or "Cost of Rent". In his personal case, the developer he worked with already owned the land, so the price was fixed. There was marginal return on the Westhampton Theater project. The only reason this project would have worked, is because the developer was inexperienced, and did not know full risk of the undertaking. The developer also wanted to own the land long term. It went in with an SUP of a four-story plan. The Architect knew it was probably a lost cause, but it would work as 3-story mix-use building complex as well.

Going through the actual design process of the Westhampton Theater Site, there was an effort to make a parking deck feasible. This would have to charge per number of space, which the prior project proposal was to tear down the Theater and Long & Foster building. The plan included underground parking with 26 spaces. The Developer tried to get a 1:1 (or 2:1) ratio with the apartments, so the site had all the commercial parking needed and over-park for residential living. There would have been offices on second floor, and condos on the third and fourth floors. There would have also been individual balconies and terraces.

Ultimately it was decided to recreate the facade of the theater, partially because of neighborhood interest. This was meant to appease the Westhampton Community due to considerable nostalgia for prior use of the site.

Large sized condos in the area, up to 3500 square feet, have been sold for over a million dollars.

Aside from the height issue, the Architect had to get a special exception for a deeper setback in the front for exterior dining.

Meeting Minutes

When: April 26, 2018

Where: Raleigh Building on the Virginia Commonwealth University Campus (VCU)

RE: Libbie Grove Draft Plan Review

In attendance: Jim Smither (VCU instructor), and two residents of the Westhampton Neighborhood

Jim Smither explained the draft plan for the Libbie and Grove commercial district produced by the Virginia Commonwealth University's Master of Urban and Regional Planning program for the course URSP 761-902, spring 2018.

Residents stated they did not like the draft plan because the buildings were three stories tall and therefore would be out of scale with the neighborhood, overburden traffic conditions and parking systems.

One resident stated the new development that the student's showed in their draft plan was good in theory but not in their neighborhood. The resident also stated it would be more appropriate in an area such as the suburbs of Charlotte or Raleigh, NC.

Both residents claimed foolish developers have been paying too much for the properties in the Libbie and Grove area and have been forced to make up their mistakes by building three and four-story buildings.

They recommended that the students go out to the site and see for themselves the parking and traffic problems. Jim told them that the students had been out to the site multiple times during the semester to study parking, traffic and urban design issues.

Both residents stated they believe the city has already made up their mind that 3 story buildings are ideal for the Libbie and Grove commercial district. They claim that city council and city staff have been telling developers "behind closed doors" that they should develop to 3 stories and that special use permits would be granted at that density.

Both residents stated that because of new development at adjacent schools and other sites in the neighborhood, the district could not take on much new commercial or residential development.

Both residents claimed the city has not taken a holistic study of the area. In other words, they stated the city has been studying traffic, parking, isolation of land use, and urban design concerns.

Both residents stated that what makes the neighborhood attractive is the residences in the area not the commercial area.

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